This Gentle Martial Art Helps the Elderly Battle Depression

March 31, 2011

When people think of martial arts, they most often think these skills are used only to fight other people. But tai chi, a 2,000-year-old Chinese martial art is helping America's aged population combat depression, according to a study published in the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

For the study, scientists evaluated 112 depressed adults, age 60 and up, being treated with an antidepressant drug (Lexapro). Of that number, 73 participants only showed partial recovery from their depression. Researchers then supplemented these participants' drug regimen with either two hours of tai chi classes each week or a health education class.

After 10 weeks, researchers used a standard diagnostic test to observe and interview the participants to determine the severity and scope of their depression. (A score of 10 or more on the scale meant that the patient was depressed; a score of 6 or less showed a complete remission from depression.)

Researchers found that 94 percent of participants who took tai chi classes scored less than 10 on the test and 65 percent scored 6 or less. But of those participants who took health education classes only 77 percent scored 10 or less, while just 51 percent scored 6 or less.

"This study shows that adding a mind-body exercise like tai chi that is widely available in the community can improve the outcomes of treating depression in older adults, who may also have other, co-existing medical conditions, or cognitive impairment," said Helen Lavretsky, MD, a professor-in-residence of psychiatry at UCLA, and lead author. "With tai chi, we may be able to treat these conditions without exposing them to additional medications."

Click here to read more about the benefits of physical exercise for seniors.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.sanemag.com/article/Tai-Chi-Depression-20169-7708